

Euramerican Colonial Life

Agenda

Understanding Life in Colonial America

Circa 1740

The Lifestyle

Most Colonial Farmers were **Subsistence Farmers**

A **subsistence farmer** is an individual who grows crops and raises livestock primarily for their own consumption and to meet the basic needs of their family or community, rather than for commercial sale or profit.

The House

**Lands were
cleared from
the primeval
forest**



The Home

- **Size:** Most families lived in a one or **two-room house** — roughly the size of a modern living room. A family of 7-10 people shared this space.
- **The "Hall":** The main room served as kitchen, dining room, living room, and bedroom all in one. There was little to no privacy.
- **Furniture:** A table, a few stools (chairs were a luxury), maybe one bed for the parents. Children slept on straw mattresses on the floor or in a loft.
- **The Fireplace:** This was the heart of the home — literally the source of heat, light, and all cooking. It consumed enormous amounts of wood (some estimates say **40 cords per year** — that's a LOT of chopping).
- **Windows:** If you had them, they were small and covered with oiled paper, not glass. Glass windows were a sign of wealth.
- **Smell:** Imagine the smell of wood smoke, animal fat, unwashed bodies, and whatever stew had been cooking for three days — all trapped in a small space with poor ventilation.

The Home



Home Sweet Home



Home Sweet Home



Morning

Imagine waking up tomorrow morning. There's no alarm clock — a rooster handles that. There's no bathroom — there's a chamber pot under your bed that someone has to empty. There's no coffee maker — someone has been up since 4 AM stoking a fire just so your family won't freeze. There's no closet full of clothes — you own maybe two outfits, and you've been wearing the same one for several days. You're not checking your phone, because there's nothing to check. The nearest neighbor is a mile away, and the nearest 'city' is a three-day ride on horseback. Welcome to Tuesday in Colonial America.



Home Sweet Home



Morning Routine

What Happened When You Woke Up?

- **Wake-Up Time:** Before dawn — roughly 4:30-5:00 AM depending on the season. Daylight was precious and not a minute could be wasted.
- **Washing:** Forget a shower. A quick splash of cold water from a basin — if that. Full baths were rare (some believed frequent bathing was actually unhealthy). Many colonists bathed **once a month** at most.
- **The Chamber Pot:** Every bedroom had one. Someone (usually a woman or child) had to carry it outside and empty it every morning. In cities, people sometimes just dumped them out the window into the street.
- **Getting Dressed:**
 - **Women:** Multiple layers — a shift (undergarment), stays (corset), petticoats, a gown, an apron, a cap. Getting dressed took time and help.
 - **Men:** A shirt, waistcoat, breeches, stockings, and shoes. Simpler, but still no zippers or elastic — everything was tied or buttoned.
 - **Children:** Toddlers of BOTH genders wore long gowns/dresses until age 5-7 — then they were "breeched" (boys got their first pair of pants, which was a major milestone).
 - **Breakfast:** Quick and simple — leftover porridge or mush (cornmeal boiled in water), bread if available, and cider or small beer (a low-alcohol beer that even children drank because water was often unsafe).

Washing

- No Indoor Plumbing
- Washing was done from a washbasin



Women's Dress



Men's Dress



Children's Dress



The Farm

- Average Colonial Farm was 100 Acres
- 90 % of Americans were farmers
- The Family might have to be fully independent
- Subsistence products
 - Corn, beans, meat, mil, cheese, butter and wool
- Cash Crops:
 - Tobacco, corn, indigo, flax and wheat
- Livestock:
 - Cattle, swine and sheep

The Farm

- Indentured Servitude was common
- More than half of all the white immigrants to the British colonies sold themselves into bondage for a period of years in order to migrate to the New World.
- Signed Contracts in England
- Became free after their period of servitude

The Farm



The Farm

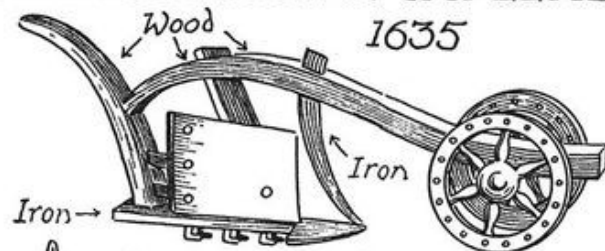


The Farm



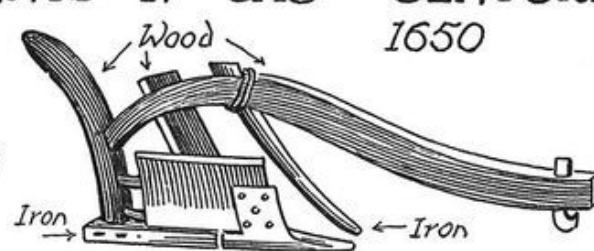
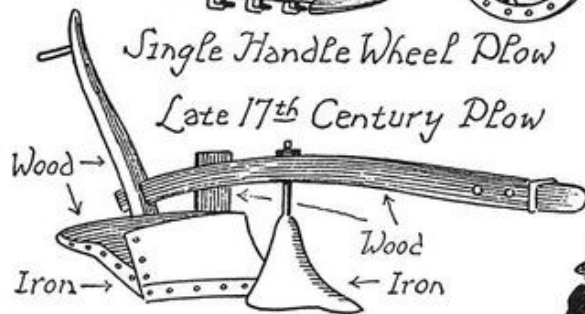
The Tools

AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS 17TH & 18TH CENTURIES



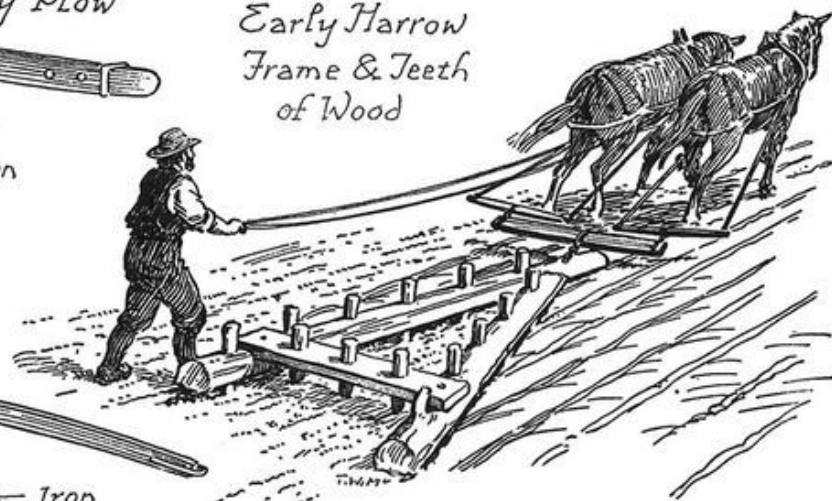
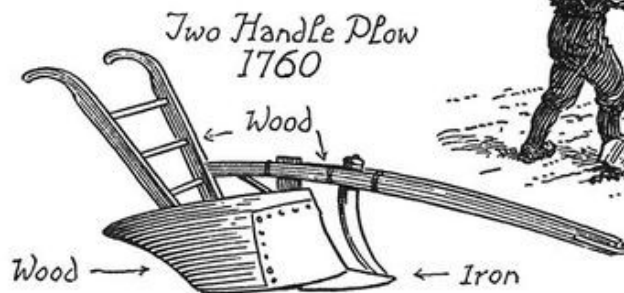
Single Handle Wheel Plow

Late 17th Century Plow

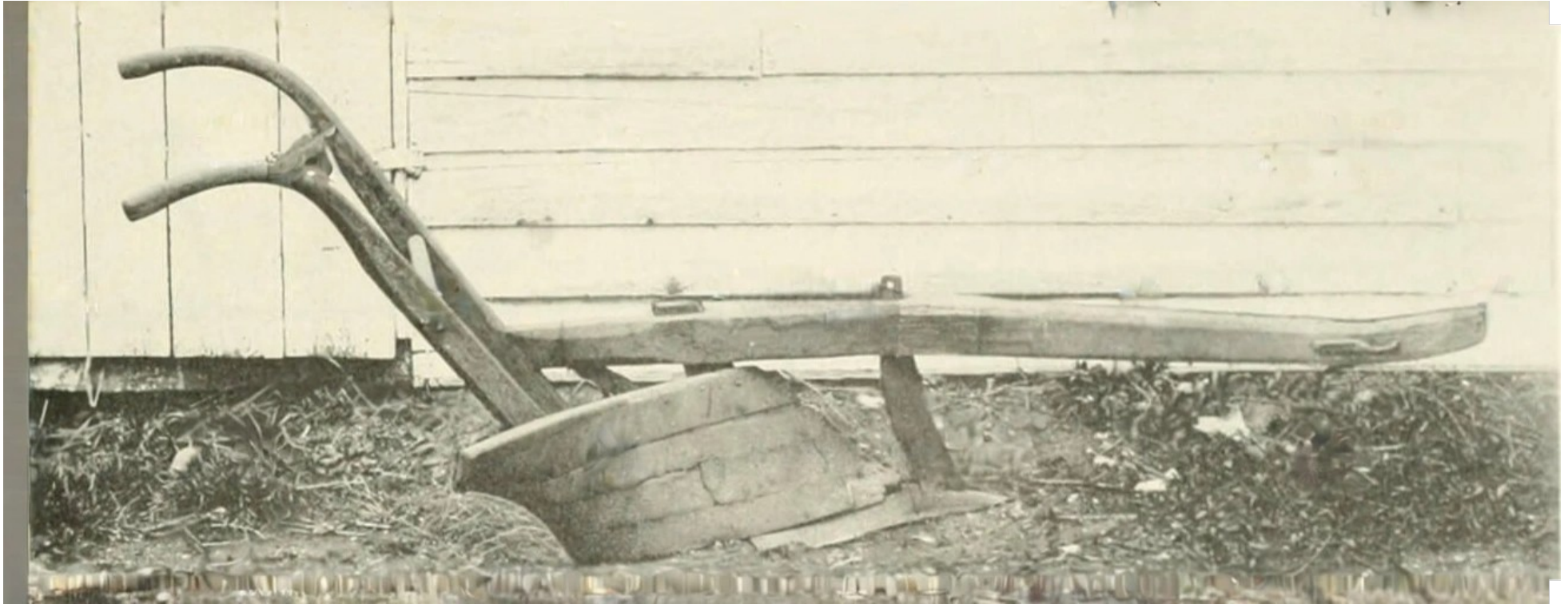


Lighter Plow

*Early Harrow
Frame & Teeth
of Wood*



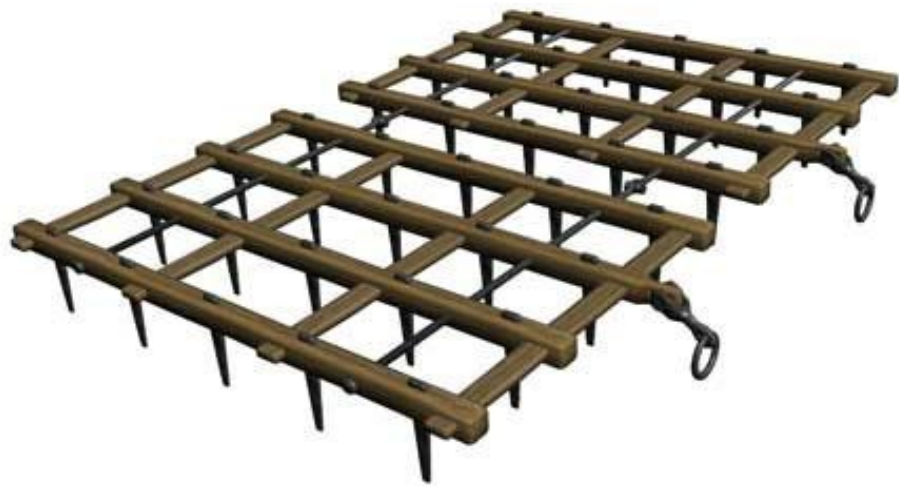
The Plow



The Plow



The Harrow



The Plow



The Workday

Women's Work:

- Cooking over an open hearth (dangerous — burns were one of the leading causes of death for women)
- Spinning thread, weaving cloth, sewing and mending clothes
- Making candles and soap (a horrible, smelly, all-day process involving animal fat)
- Tending the kitchen garden (herbs, vegetables)
- Preserving food (salting, smoking, pickling — there was no refrigeration)
- Caring for children, the sick, and the elderly
- Hauling water from a well or stream

The Workday

Men's Work:

- Farming (plowing, planting, harvesting — all by hand or with animal labor)
- Chopping wood — an almost daily necessity
- Hunting and fishing
- Building and repairing structures (fences, barns, the house itself)
- If in a trade: blacksmithing, tanning leather, milling grain, carpentry

The Workday

Children's Work:

- **Ages 3-5:** Gathering eggs, fetching kindling, watching younger siblings
- **Ages 6-10:** Hauling water, weeding gardens, feeding livestock, learning to spin or use basic tools
- **Ages 10+:** Essentially doing adult work. Boys might be sent away as apprentices. Girls learned the full range of domestic skills.

Birthrates and Mortality

- Birthrate was high
 - Seven to eight surviving children
- Mortality was high
 - 150-300 deaths per 1,000 births (15%-30%)
 - 30%-50% all deaths under age 5
- Duration shorter
 - Average Life Expectancy of 50 years

Healthcare

- No Hospitals
- Midwives and Friends helped during childbirth



Healthcare

- Yellow Fever
- Smallpox
- Malaria
- Dysentery

Diseases

Epidemics that Affected Colonial New England (1620 to 1764)

Year(s)	Illness	Location and Severity
1633	Unknown fever (likely Smallpox)	Plymouth, Massachusetts. About 20 deaths.
1638	Smallpox & Typhus	Massachusetts. Few deaths.
1647	Influenza	Massachusetts & Connecticut. About 90 deaths.
1648-49	Smallpox & Whooping Cough	Massachusetts.
1657	Measles	Boston, Massachusetts. Few deaths.
1658	Typhoid Fever	New Amsterdam and New Netherlands.
1659	Whooping Cough	Massachusetts.
1660-61	Influenza	New England. Few deaths.
1665	Influenza	New England. Few deaths.
1666	Smallpox	New England. About 40 deaths.
1677-78	Smallpox	Boston, Massachusetts. Over 200 deaths.
1678-79	Influenza	New England. Few deaths.
1687-88	Measles	Massachusetts.
1689	Diphtheria	New London, Connecticut. Many deaths.
1689-90	Smallpox	New England and New York. At least 320 deaths.
1693	Yellow Fever	Boston, Massachusetts.
1697-98	Influenza	Throughout New England. Heavy mortality.
1699	Influenza	Throughout New England. Heavy mortality.
1702-03	Smallpox & Scarlet Fever	Boston, Massachusetts. About 300 deaths.
1710	Influenza	Connecticut. 250 deaths.
1713-14	Measles	New England. At least 150 deaths.
1721	Smallpox	Boston, Massachusetts. 844 deaths.

1727	Typhoid Fever	Norwich, Connecticut (40 deaths), and Woodbury, Connecticut.
1729	Measles	Boston, Massachusetts (15 deaths), and New York City, New York.
1730	Smallpox	Boston, Massachusetts. About 500 deaths.
1732-34	Influenza	New England and mid-Atlantic colonies.
1732	Dysentery	Salem, Massachusetts.
1732	Smallpox	Wallingford, Connecticut (14 deaths).
1734	Typhoid Fever	New Haven, Connecticut.
1734	Dysentery	Boston, Massachusetts, and New London, Connecticut.
1735-41	Diphtheria	New York, New Jersey, and New England. Up to 20,000 deaths.
1735-36	Scarlet Fever	Boston, Massachusetts. 100 deaths.
1736	Scarlet Fever	Up to 100 deaths.
1737	Typhoid Fever	Worcester County, Massachusetts.
1737-38	Smallpox	Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. 12 deaths.
1739	Smallpox	Newport, Rhode Island. 17 deaths.
1739	Measles	Massachusetts & Connecticut.
1741	Typhoid Fever	Sutton, Massachusetts (19 deaths), and New London, Connecticut.
1742	Dysentery	New London, Connecticut.
1744-45	Diphtheria	Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York.
1745	Dysentery	Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. Several deaths.
1745	Typhoid Fever	Stamford, Connecticut. 70 deaths.
1747	Smallpox	Harwich, Massachusetts. 9 deaths.
1747-48	Diphtheria	Massachusetts.

Year(s)	Illness	Location and Severity
1747-48	Measles	Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.
1748-49	Influenza or Pneumonia	Atlantic seaboard.
1749	Typhus and Dysentery	Connecticut. At least 150 deaths.
1750-55	Diphtheria or Scarlet Fever	New England and New York.
1751	Smallpox	Boston, Massachusetts. 569 deaths.
1753	Smallpox	New London, Connecticut. 4 deaths.
1755	Mumps	Brookfield, Massachusetts. Several deaths.
1756	Dysentery	New England.
1759	Measles	Widespread throughout the colonies.
1760-61	Smallpox	New England.
1761	Influenza	Along the Atlantic seaboard.
1762-63	Diphtheria	Massachusetts and Connecticut.
1763	Typhus	Nantucket, Massachusetts. 222 deaths.
1764	Smallpox	Boston, Massachusetts. 170 deaths.

Table Source: *Almanacs of American Life: Colonial America to 1763* by Thomas L. Purvis, 1999. Adapted and modified by Shellie Karol-Chik.

Militia

- Each Town and County had a militia
- They would train monthly: drill and practice
- Mandated between ages of 16 and 60 (varied)
- Required ownership of a firearm

Militia



Militia



Militia



**Indian Attacks
and raids were
almost non-stop
along the frontier**

Summary

- Our Ancestors were hard working, hardy people
- Who despite hardships, prospered to give us everything that we have today.

The End